

Along after calf marking, the guy feeding cattle on the Divide rolled up to the gate at the Middle Well the same time a black calf arrived, slobbering big bubbles over a water trough across the fence. He made a hasty retreat back to the house.

On a February day in the shortgrass country, an animal staring in the water trough, foaming at the mouth at a watering, means a one inch vaccinating needle and a fully extended 10-inch syringe on the tip of a 10-foot fishing pole is too short to give a hydrophobic victim a shot through the fence, much less in an open place. One round with that horrible disease is enough for "Taps" at Arlington Cemetery to sound like a version of "The Happy Little Bugle Boy."

After a diagnostic session between the cowboy and myself, we decided to pair him with his mother to bring to a smaller pasture for observation. It so happened, she was easy to find. He hadn't nursed in a least a day.

The calf slogged along, tracking his mother, puffing big wet bubbles to float and burst. The winds gusted high enough to lift graveled dirt, garnished in broomweed shatters, to handicap the job. Had the patient been another mile farther from the hospital, he wouldn't have been the

only one mouthing bubbles and walking with the head pointed straight out.

Penned, the cow ate a chip of hay; the calf stood back, grinding his teeth between intermittent coughing spells, accentuating the bubble symptom. I sat in a trough, struggling to remember if or where I'd seen similar symptoms.

Tried to recall whether cattle blubbered and ground teeth the awful winter we pastured cattle south of Rankin on the Pecos River; or did the alkali dust choke man and beast so badly that we all blubbered and ground our teeth from inhaling a higher ratio of solids and mineral than air and vapor?

An audit of the medicines in the saddle shed showed, among cracked obstetric gloves and pieces of marking chalk, two empty cans of gall salve, an open jar of solidified udder balm, a half-full spray bomb of iodine, and a 40 year-old bottle of screwworm medicine. On the floor, a paper sack held a dozen thumb-size capsules to worm horses and give some termite control when administered in plank corrals to enough horses to matter.

Out of the wind in the saddle shed, a faint recollection blinked of helping doctor calves on an old man's outfit in my youth. I could nearly call his name. He

was the oldest son in a big ranching family down close to Eldorado or Sonora. But they had lots of country all over the shortgrass country.

In the work, big whiteface steer calves keeled over coming to the pens. The regular hand, or one of the regulars, mixed a concoction from coal oil and laundry bluing – standby medicine for humans and cattle in those days. But the results went untested as the calves died too fast to tell if the medicine worked. (Later, I learned he was doctoring a strain of brain fever from a very optimistic viewpoint.)

Down at the house in the refrigerator in the garage, more miracle medicines turned up in the shelves in the door – some with labels. Also, on the top of the refrigerator stood a big bottle of an antibiotic we use for every malady – LA 200. By the bottle was an innocuous plastic bolus gun. Sitting there, I suspected, to torment my memory more.

Alone indoors, I laid my head on the kitchen table. In the quiet, places evolved using rivers for points: Pecos, Kickapoo, Spring Creek, Johnson Draw, Concho, Lometa and Big Hollow. Slowly the answer arose of Goat Whiskers the Younger's outfit and the ranch's men risking our lives one August, to throw and doctor rank Angus calves with Terramycin boluses in a thin-residued, bellowing and

kicking siege. We were so overmatched, we'd have surrendered if we'd known where or when to give up.

How could I have forgotten old Felicano and me, sawing off a calf's head that fateful summer to send to a laboratory to tell whether we'd doctored a rabid calf? The answer is because the hippocampus loops down into the optic nerves with age, causing blank spots that turn the Morse Code into a solid line.

The danger for rabies ended in two days. We shot antibiotics every three days with no success. One day, rummaging in a kitchen cabinet, an open bottle of a drug called "Baytrill" surfaced. The find saved the calf. In 24 hours he'd nursed all his mother's milk.

My archives project plenty dimly. However, the ranch of the brain fever calves belonged to a Henderson. I can't remember his first name. "Mister" will have to do. But the memory remains clear of riding from his pens early every golden autumn morning in a stunning live oak country.